



Humanism in the Vernacular: The Case of Leonardo Bruni

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HUMANISM AND CREATIVITY IN THE RENAISSANCE

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HUMANISM AND CREATIVITY IN THE RENAISSANCE

Essays in Honor of Ronald G. Witt

EDITED BY

CHRISTOPHER S. CELENZA AND KENNETH GOUWENS



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CHAPTER ONE

HUMANISM IN THE VERNACULAR:
THE CASE OF LEONARDO BRUNI

James Hankins

Among the many issues that Ronald G. Witt's work has made central to the study of the Italian Renaissance is the question of humanism's relationship to the vernacular. An aspect of this question that has only recently drawn the attention of scholars concerns the degree to which humanism had ambitions to appeal, and was able to appeal, to an audience beyond Latin-reading professional humanists and their patrons. Humanism is often taken to be (and sometimes dismissed as) an elite movement affecting only persons wealthy enough to enjoy an education in the classics. But recent studies disclose the desire of humanists to influence a broader social spectrum and to cross gender lines by making available the works of classical authors and contemporary humanists in vernacular languages. New research has also highlighted the role of humanism in shaping non-elite culture, particularly through public ritual, public rhetoric, spectacle and visual symbolism, as well as through humanist writing in the vernacular.¹ Since Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444) was the best-selling author of the

¹ Alison Brown, "Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence," in her *The Medici in Florence: The Exercise of Language and Power* (Florence, 1992), 215–45; eadem, ed., *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1995); eadem, "Demasking Renaissance Republicanism," in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, 2000), 179–99; Ronald G. Witt, *"In the Footsteps of the Ancients": The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden, 2000); Stephen J. Milner, "Citing the Ringhiera: The Politics of Place and Public Address in Trecento Florence," *Italian Studies*, 55 (2000), 53–82; idem, "Communication, Consensus and Conflict: Rhetorical Principles, the *Ars Concionandi* and Social Ordering in Late Medieval Italy," in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in its Medieval and Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and J. O. Ward (Leiden, forthcoming); Milner, "Exile, Rhetoric, and the Limits of Civic Republican Discourse," in *At the Margins: Minority Groups in Premodern Italy*, ed. idem (Minneapolis, 2005), 162–91; James Hankins, "Lorenzo de' Medici's *De summo bono* and the Popularization of Ficinian Platonism," in *Humanistica. Per Cesare Vasoli*, ed. Fabrizio Meroi and Elisabetta Scapparone (Florence, 2004), 61–69 (with further references).



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Quattrocento and a model for humanists throughout Italy, the concentration on Bruni's Latin and vernacular writings should not suffer quite so much from the usual methodological defect of the case study: i.e., the tendency of the single case to stand in for the normal and the typical. If Bruni is not a typical Quattrocento humanist, nobody is.² So the first part of this essay will look at Bruni's contributions to vernacular literature and the motivations leading him to write in the vernacular. The second part will discuss the translation of Bruni's Latin writings into the vernacular, a subject that has been much neglected, not just for Bruni, but for the humanist movement in general.

1

Scholars who approach the subject of Bruni's relations with vernacular literature from the direction of Italian literature might be surprised to hear that he had any relations with the *volgare* at all. The period of Bruni's life and greatest influence—let us say the century from 1375 to 1475—has been labelled by authorities on Italian literary history as the *secolo senza poesia*, the one century in the history of Italian literature lacking in imaginative writing. For critics of this ilk, the period is a creative hiatus, sandwiched between the golden age of the Three Crowns of Italy on the one hand—Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio—and the refflorescence of the vernacular in the age of Lorenzo de' Medici on the other. According to this still-common view, it was Bruni and his fellow humanists who were largely responsible for the strange death of Tuscan literature in the intervening period. Their excessive adulation of classical literature absorbed all cultural energies to the detriment of the vernacular. As Letizia Panizza summarizes,

critics interested in the vernacular see the cult of the classics as culturally regressive, elitist, unoriginal and predominantly didactic. . . .

² On Bruni, see my collection *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance* (2 vols.; Rome, 2003), I: *Humanism*. I was introduced to Leonardo Bruni in 1977 when Ronald Witt asked me to make a translation of his *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae* for his undergraduate lecture course. This translation was later published as part of Bruni, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, ed. and tr. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton, 1987).



Poets were replaced by scholars who gave themselves over to imitating a dead literature instead of carrying forwards the newly-founded and vigorous one in their own spoken mother tongue.³

Looking at the whole of Bruni's literary production, it cannot be denied that by far the largest part of his scholarly energies went into the great humanist project of reviving Latin literary culture and spreading the knowledge and emulation of the ancient world among the elites of Italian society. And it is true that he sometimes describes his own forays into vernacular literature dismissively, as mere *jeux d'esprit*, relaxations from the more serious tasks of historical writing in Latin and the translation of Greek philosophy and literature. However, it is not true to say that the mature Bruni despised the vernacular. The impression that he did so mostly comes from an early work, the *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum* (1401/5), written under the influence of his great friend of that period, Niccolò Niccoli. In this work it is clear that Bruni shares with the other young classicists of the Salutati circle an embarrassment at the popular enthusiasm for Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. Evidently the great Trecento writers did not come up to the standards of learning and eloquence these young men had imbibed from their classical reading. David Quint and other scholars have argued persuasively that the second book of the *Dialogues* does not represent a genuine repudiation of the high classicism of the first book, as was famously maintained by Hans Baron.⁴ Bruni did eventually change his views about the great Florentine writers of the Trecento, but not as a result of the death of Giangaleazzo Visconti in 1402. It was only two decades later, after his long years in papal service, around the time of his break with Niccoli in 1419. In the attack on Niccoli which signals his change of heart, the invective *In nebulonem maledicum* (1424), Bruni issues what is in effect a palinode for his youthful views, including his views on the vernacular writers. Niccoli is criticized sharply for his attacks on the *optimus nobilissimusque poeta* Dante and for his absurd claims that Petrarch and Boccaccio were ignorant of literature.⁵

³ Letizia Panizza, "The Quattrocento," in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile, rev. ed. (Cambridge, 1999), 131–77, at 131.

⁴ David Quint, "Humanism and Modernity. A Reconsideration of Bruni's *Dialogues*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38 (1985), 432–45.

⁵ Bruni, *In nebulonem maledicum*, in *Leonardo Bruni: Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed. Paolo Viti (Turin, 1996), 338–70.



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To be sure, Bruni always remained convinced of the superiority of Latin in both prose and verse, and he sees the improvements made by his contemporaries in the art of writing Latin as one of the great achievements of his age. Indeed, for him, the revival of Latin is more or less synonymous with the whole Renaissance of culture going on around him.⁶ But since, following Dante, he regarded Latin as an artificial, learned language invented by great writers in antiquity, he believed that bilingualism was the natural and inevitable condition of mankind.⁷ This meant that, in his mature period at least, he could recognize the distinct merit of vernacular writing. As he says in his *Life of Dante*, the vernacular had “its own esteem and merit,” “its own perfection and its own sound, and its polished and learned diction.”⁸ Dante himself wrote poor Latin prose and verse, but this was the fault of the rude and monkish age in which he wrote; we can still esteem him for his great achievement in the vernacular. Petrarch began the revival of Latin, for which he deserves to be chiefly famous, but he was also the equal of Dante in the *canzone* and the unrivalled master of the sonnet. For Bruni, the vernacular retains its value even in the midst of the Renaissance of Latin literature, especially as a medium for communicating antique values to the large mass of persons who are not educated in *grammatica* and never will be.

Bruni's convictions about the value of the vernacular were given practical expression, for, beginning in the early 1420s, he began himself to cultivate the vernacular, as the list of works in Appendix A will show. Bruni's vernacular works fall basically into two groups. The two *canzoni*, the sonnet, the *Novella di Antioco* and the *Lives of Dante and Petrarch* can be seen as efforts to use traditional vernacular literary genres to spread among the Latinless the civic ideals to whose elaboration and propagation Bruni dedicated the last thirty years of his life. By contrast, the *Difesa*, the *Risposta*, the orations for Niccolò Tolentino and for the Guelf Party, as well as the three letters patent to the city of Volterra, Pope Eugene IV and Francesco Sforza respectively, can be seen primarily as vehicles of official

⁶ Bruni, *Vite di Dante e del Petrarca*, in *ibid.*, 537–60, esp. 554–56.

⁷ For Bruni's views on the history of Latin and the *questione della lingua*, see Angelo Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists. Studies of Language and Intellectual History in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Italy* (Leiden, 1993).

⁸ Bruni, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed. Viti, 550.



Florentine propaganda. They also served as models of diplomatic and ceremonial rhetoric in the vernacular, employing genres cultivated primarily by public men.

Let me begin with the first group. Bruni's civic ideals, laid out most fully in his *History of the Florentine People*, called for the middling classes of men, the Popolo, to participate in government and put its common good ahead of their private interests.⁹ The powerful could and should participate as well, but only if they moderated their behavior and accepted that the predominant power in the state lay with the Popolo. The Popolo needed in their turn to accept the guidance of the wise and the good. The passions of the many needed to be guided by reason. So the Popolo should heed the wise and the good, but they should also seek to educate themselves (as far as possible) in history, thus learning civil prudence, and moral philosophy, thus learning moderation. The ancient classics of Greco-Roman antiquity would provide the material for this civic education.

Bruni's implied target in all this is the competing value-system generated by French chivalry. The chivalric ethos was dangerous in cities because it taught powerful men that their private honor was more important than the common good. Their feudal rivalries tore the city apart, as Bruni demonstrated over and over in the *Florentine History*. Chivalry also made a fetish of romantic love, a disordered passion which led to the weakening of families—the building blocks of the state—and other civic discords. As an antidote to the noxious nonsense spread by chivalric literature, Bruni proposed a civic education based on Aristotle's moral philosophy and on the study of history, particularly the republican history of Livy, Bruni's model in his own historical writing. In this he was following or reviving a tradition begun by Brunetto Latini and other intellectuals of the communal period.¹⁰

If we look at Bruni's vernacular literary works, it is easy to see how they fit into this project of fighting the chivalric with the civic. Bruni had tried to popularize Aristotle's *Ethics* by discarding the difficult medieval version and retranslating the work into a more

⁹ See my essay, "Teaching Civil Prudence in the Historical Writings of Leonardo Bruni," forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference *Ethik—Wissenschaft oder Lebenskunst? Modelle der Normenbegründung von der Antike bis zur Frühen Neuzeit*, Munich, 4–6 November 2004.

¹⁰ Witt, *Footsteps*, esp. 180–210.



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accessible literary Latin. He had further popularized the work by composing, around 1424, the *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae*, a Latin dialogue which combined a review of the major ancient schools of philosophy (taken mostly from Cicero's *De finibus*) with a summary of the most important teachings of the *Ethics*. The *Canzone morale* in the vernacular takes this process of popularization one step further by putting the major conclusions of the *Isagogicon* into Italian verse. The message of this frankly didactic poem is that, though each of the major schools of philosophy has something of value to offer, the Peripatetic school has the most useful teachings, as it emphasizes moderation and virtuous activity in the present life.

Bruni's attack on the folly of romantic love is most clearly seen in his *Novella di Antioco*. Bruni composed this novel (based on a story in Plutarch) in the vernacular to be a companion piece to his Latin translation of the *Fabula Tancredi* from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (IV.1).¹¹ He jokingly says that he is compensating the vernacular for his appropriation of the Tancred tale for Latin literature. In the latter tale, it will be recalled, Boccaccio recounts how the uncontrollable sexual jealousy of Tancred, prince of Salerno, leads him to kill his daughter's lover Guiscardo and to send her his heart in a goblet; the daughter, Sigismonda, adds poison to the cup and drinks it, dying pathetically in the approved Gothic manner. As an antidote to this tale of disordered passion, which he explicitly castigates as a modern "Italian" behavior pattern, Bruni tells the story of Antioco, son of King Seleuco of Syria. (This novella, by the way, became quite famous in the seventeenth century, forming the subject of a play by Corneille, an opera by Alessandro Stradella, and an English novel by "Mr Theobald," a critic of Alexander Pope.)¹²

In Bruni's novella, set like the *Decameron* in a villa outside Florence, the story of Tancred has just been told and has reduced all the women to tears. At this point a man, "whose name we'll not men-

¹¹ On Bruni's retelling of the Tancred story from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, see also the essay below by Timothy Kircher.

¹² For the recent bibliography on the *Novella di Antioco*, also known as the *Seleuco*, and Bruni's translation of the *Fabula Tancredi*, see *Favole parabole istorie. Le forme della scrittura novellistica dal medioevo al rinascimento*, Atti del Convegno di Pisa, 26–28 ottobre 1998, ed. Gabriella Albanese, Lucia Battaglia Ricci, and Rossella Bessi (Rome, 2000), esp. the article of M. Martelli, "Il *Seleuco* di Leonardo Bruni fra storia ed elegia," 250–86. Text in *Novella di Leonardo Bruni Aretino*, ed. Giovanni Papanti [*per nozze*] (Livorno, 1870).



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tion at present, but he's a man of great learning in Greek and Latin and well-read in ancient history"—obviously Bruni himself—tells the ladies a tale “to put them in a happy and festive mood” . . . “as though to reverse the effects of the first story.”¹³ Bruni starts by saying that he has always found the ancient Greeks far in advance of modern Italians when it came to humanity and *gentilezza di cuore*. In Bruni's tale the king's son, Antioco, falls in love with the king's young wife, Stratonica, but conceals his passion out of decency and respect for his father. Under the influence of this unrequited love his health is ruined, and he is about to die when a wise physician learns the real cause. By a clever device, the physician leads King Seleuco to arrange for an amicable divorce and for the remarriage of his wife to his son. For Bruni this is a happy ending, eminently sensible behavior which leads to the prosperous continuance of the monarchy and the provision of grandchildren for the doting King Seleuco (“who afterwards, seeing his little grandchildren, the most certain continuation of his line, lived in the greatest content and good will”).¹⁴ But Bruni expects us also to realize that rational behavior such as this would never be possible for someone immersed in chivalric traditions, where love and personal honor are inextricably intertwined. A man like Tancred will destroy his monarchy and kill his daughter to satisfy a pernicious notion of honor; but Seleuco saves his son and his monarchy by subordinating his private honor to the common good. The ancients thus teach us that love of family and loyalty to the state come before personal sexual honor. And the novel form allows Bruni to communicate this message to persons outside his usual audience, namely gentlewomen.¹⁵

The *Lives of Dante and Petrarch* can similarly be seen as attempts to use the prestige of Florence's popular culture heroes to teach lessons in citizenship. Bruni rejects Boccaccio's portrait of Dante, “full of love and sighs and burning tears; it is as if,” Bruni says mockingly, “man were born into this world only to find himself in those ten

¹³ *Ibid.*: “il cui nome tacemo al presente, ma egli è uomo di grande studio in greco ed in latino e molto curioso delle antiche storie . . . per ridurli a letizia e a festa . . . quasi per il contrario di quella di prima.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: “susseguentemente vedendo i piccioli nipoti—certissima successione della sua progenie—visse contentissimo e di buonissima volontà.”

¹⁵ Even if one reader focused rather on the novel as documenting the extraordinary power of women and love over the male sex; see Appendix B.



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days of love . . . in the *Hundred Tales*.”¹⁶ As is well known, Bruni’s *Life* gives us a civic Dante, a man admirable for his military and political service. He is a statesman, not a courtly lover. His great poetry was the result of learning and study, not infused by divine inspiration as described in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Petrarch on the other hand is praised for his prudence in *not* taking part in politics, but in choosing a quiet and leisurely life. Petrarch realized, as Dante did not, that one’s fellow citizens are often ungrateful and give exile and disgrace as bitter rewards for public service.¹⁷ This sounds like a contradiction of Bruni’s settled principles, but it really is not: Bruni praises service to the republic, but recognizes that there are times and places where prudent men will elect not to serve. In such cases, they can still serve the common good with their studies, as Cicero did in his exile. And Petrarch’s studies were certainly of tremendous value to the state in that they enabled his contemporaries and descendants to benefit from ancient wisdom, a prerequisite for good government. The message here for the vernacular reader is that the study of classical antiquity, often perceived as useless and elitist by popular culture, is in fact a form of service to the state and an indispensable prerequisite for distinguished writing, whether in Latin or the vernacular.

We can deal more briefly with the other genus of Bruni’s vernacular writings, the works written for ceremonial or diplomatic purposes and intended to serve as models for public rhetoric in the vernacular. These works, too, Bruni uses as occasions to spread his civic gospel. In the case of the oration for Niccolò Tolentino, Florence’s mercenary captain, Bruni actually delivered the speech from the *ringhiera* or speaking platform outside the Palazzo Vecchio to a large public audience on the Feast of San Giovanni Battista, 25 June 1433. This gave him the chance to repeat in the volgare themes from two important Latin works, his *De militia* (1420) and *Oratio in funere Nanni Strozze* (1428). In these works Bruni had rejected the French chivalric model of knighthood—knights errant saving damsels in distress, smiting the paynim, and attempting to seduce their lord’s wife—and

¹⁶ *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 85.

¹⁷ The parallel case of Giano della Bella is told in Bruni’s *History of the Florentine People*, ed. and tr. James Hankins (2 vols. to date; Cambridge, Mass., 2001–), I (2001), 387 (Book IV, chap. 44).



had substituted a new ideal of civic knighthood, derived in equal parts from Aristotle and Cicero, in which the civic knight had as his first duty the defense of the state in war, and in peacetime the protection of widows and orphans.¹⁸ In the Tolentino speech Bruni underlines the incomparable dignity of the great military captain, a dignity he merits because of his key role in protecting and enlarging the state. This thesis Bruni illustrates with a clutch of quotations from Cicero, Plutarch, Plato and Aristotle's *Politics*, though what effect these quotations had on his hearers we can hardly imagine. But we do know that references to the classics were common in ceremonial speeches of the time, such as the vernacular speeches given by Stefano Porcari, which show a similar didactic bent.¹⁹

But it is the *Risposta agli ambasciatori del Re d'Aragona* that gives us the most striking example of Bruni using the vernacular to spread the teachings of Latin humanism. In 1443 ambassadors came to Florence from the new Aragonese king of Naples to request that Florence break its alliance with Francesco Sforza, then a condottiere in the employ of Venice and Florence, and align itself with Alfonso of Aragon instead. This was an important public occasion that took place in the great audience chamber of the Palazzo Vecchio and was undoubtedly attended by a large number of leading citizens as *richiesti* in addition to the Priors and the Colleges. Bruni was called upon to make the reply for the Signori. Bruni gracefully acknowledged the great respect of the Florentine state for King Alfonso and its ardent desire to serve him. But it had made promises to Sforza, and if it were shameful for a private individual to break promises, it was utterly disgraceful and ruinous for a whole people, after solemn deliberation, to go back on its word; therefore the Florentines would respectfully have to decline his request.²⁰

Bruni's eloquence on this occasion was much admired by his Florentine audience, but if they had read his *History of the Florentine*

¹⁸ See James Hankins, "Civic Knighthood in the Early Renaissance: Leonardo Bruni's *De militia*," forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference *The Transformation of the Knight in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe, Copenhagen 23–25 September 1999*, ed. Hannamari Ragn Jensen, Lene Wagge Petersen and Evelyn Welch, Renaissance-studier (Copenhagen).

¹⁹ Bruni's speech to Niccolò da Tolentino is in Bruni's *Opere*, ed. Viti, 817–23.

²⁰ The *Risposta* is in *ibid.*, 853–61, under the title *Orazione agli ambasciatori del re d'Aragona*.



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People, they would have found his words strangely familiar. For in Book VII of that work, under the year 1351, Bruni describes a precisely similar situation where the Pisans are called upon by the tyrannical archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Visconti, to break their peace treaty with the Florentines and make war against them in alliance with himself. The Pisan reply is given by Franceschino Gambacurta, a quondam client of the Visconti but a man who, according to Bruni, puts country ahead of private loyalties. Gambacurta makes an argument very similar to that used by Bruni in 1443, citing the same authorities and using almost the same words.²¹ Book VII of Bruni's *History* was published by 1438 and formally presented to the Signoria in that year, so some of his audience were probably aware of the sources of Bruni's eloquence in 1443, answering the Aragonese ambassadors. For these members of his audience, his vernacular speech would have been a powerful example of the utility of history for contemporary statesmen and diplomats. As an example of how humanistic studies could provide vernacular orators with prudence and eloquence in key situations, it could hardly be bettered.

The above examples show, I believe, that though the mature Bruni privileged the Latin language and its literature, he was not hostile to the vernacular, and indeed valued it for certain purposes and genres. Not only did it have "its own esteem and merit" in the hands of great writers such as Dante and Petrarch; it also was an important vehicle for spreading the message of civic humanism to parts of the population that might not otherwise hear it. We might add that the statistics assembled in Appendix A show that several of Bruni's *volgare* works were as popular as any of his original works in Latin. The *Lives of Dante and Petrarch*, the Tolentino speech, and the *Novella di Antioco* survive in as many copies and editions as Bruni's most popular Latin works, and the *Difesa*, *Risposta* and the *Canzone morale* are not far behind these in popularity.

2

In his recent important book on the origins of humanism, Ronald Witt makes the point that the lively Trecento tradition in Florence

²¹ Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, II (2004), 346–52 (Book VII, chaps. 71–75).



of making vernacular translations of the classics prepared that city to become the leader of the humanist movement at the end of the fourteenth century.²² The translations of Cicero, Seneca, Livy, Sallust and Aristotle by men like Brunetto Latini, Giambono da Bona, and Bartolomeo da San Concordio established an interest in and an identification with ancient Roman republicanism among Florentines and provided an alternative to the culture of chivalry and courtly love coming from high medieval France. Witt's observation is a valuable one that explains much about the emergence of civic humanism—what Quentin Skinner has recently taken to describing as “neo-Roman” culture—and indeed about the origins of the broader Renaissance movement.²³ But we should also remember that vernacular classicism does not come to an end when the Latin humanism of Salutati, Bruni and his generation begins to take root in Florence after 1400. As the history of Bruni's own Latin works shows us, Latin humanism develops a secondary audience among the non-Latinate public via vernacular translations. In some cases, and particularly in the case of Bruni's historical writings, humanist writings were as popular or more popular in the vernacular than in the original Latin.

To take the example of the histories, of Bruni's six historical works, only the *Commentaria rerum graecarum*—his epitome of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*—has no sizable footprint in the vernacular. Bruni's *Punic War*, a compilation based on Polybius, was extremely popular in both Latin and the vernacular, mostly because it served to fill the gap in Roman history created by the loss of the second decade of Livy's history. It was translated, extraordinarily, five times in the fifteenth century, and survives in equal numbers of Latin and Italian manuscripts, about 120 in each case. But before 1600 it was printed twelve times in Italian, four times in French and once in German—17 vernacular editions in all, compared with only five Latin editions. The first Latin edition appeared only in 1498, after seven of the Italian editions had already appeared. The *Gothic War*, a compilation based on Procopius, survives in 127 Latin manuscripts, more than four times the number of Italian manuscripts, and was printed

²² Witt, *Footsteps*, 453–54.

²³ Quentin Skinner adopts the “neo-Roman” term in place of civic humanism in his *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), implicitly throughout chap. 1, but explicitly on 11, n. 31.



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in twice as many Latin editions as Italian ones, but it is clearly a well-known text in both languages, and was available in Spanish, French, German and English as well. On the other hand, the historical essay on the origins of Mantua is twice as popular in the vernacular as it is in Latin. The vernacular version of Bruni's memoirs of his own time, the *Rerum suo tempore gestarum liber*, survives in the vernacular in only eight manuscripts (as opposed to 69 manuscripts of the Latin original), but it was printed twice in Italian, as compared with only three imprints of the Latin original. Finally, Bruni's greatest work, his *History of the Florentine People* (1415–42), survives in three times as many Latin manuscripts—sixty—as does the vernacular version by Donato Acciaiuoli (1473), but Acciaiuoli's translation was printed twice during the Quattrocento (1476, 1492), and twice in the sixteenth century, whereas the original Latin was not printed until 1610. So after 1473, the Acciaiuoli translation was clearly the dominant vehicle through which Bruni's masterwork was known during the Renaissance itself.

I have no wish to exaggerate, and it must be pointed out that it is only in the case of Bruni's historical works that his vernacular profile is broadly comparable to his profile in Latin. His Latin dialogues, letters, treatises and orations never become popular in the vernacular, though they circulated very widely in Latin manuscripts. The high *rilievo* of Bruni's historical works in the vernacular suggests, in fact, that something of a conscious effort was afoot to promote them in that medium, and this suspicion is borne out by a variety of evidence. We know, for example, that Bruni himself arranged for the translation of the *Punic Wars*, composed *da un suo caro amico*, possibly Nicola di Vieri de' Medici or his son.²⁴ Acciaiuoli tells us

²⁴ A colophon in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (= BNCF), MS. Naz. II.II.69 (a. 1468) has the following note: "Questo libro fu chopiato per me Michele d'Andrea Singnorini dalla propria origine che fece vulgarizare detto messere Lionardo." For this manuscript see my *Repertorium Brunianum: A Critical Guide to the Writings of Leonardo Bruni* (Rome, 1997), no. 824. Numerous other copies, e.g. BNCF, MS. Naz. II.III.257 (= *Repertorium*, no. 838); Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana MS. Ashb. 543 (= *Repertorium*, no. 645); Laurenziana MS Segni 4 (= *Repertorium*, no. 696) speak of the translation as having been made by "un suo amico". BNCF Magl. XXIII.125 (= *Repertorium*, no. 796) says in the rubric to the translation proper (fol. 1v) that the text was "composto in latino per messer Leonardo d'Arezzo et poi per lui volgarizzato", while on the previous folio the rubricator says "e poi traslatato in volghare a 'stanza d'uno suo amico." Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Camp. App. 1375 (= *Repertorium*, no. 1559), also attributes the *volgarizzamento* to Bruni him-



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that Bruni would certainly have himself translated his *Florentine Histories* into Italian had he lived longer, and he, Acciaiuoli, was translating them at the express command of the Florentine *Signoria*. It was his duty as a citizen to translate them for they would make known the glorious deeds of Florence and provide an education in civil prudence to his fellow-citizens who lacked a knowledge of Latin.²⁵ Here again, we see the vernacular being used as a means to spread the teachings of Florentine civic humanism to an audience far wider than the narrow Latin-reading public.

It is obvious, of course, that translating Latin works into Italian did more than simply make them available to the Latinless. It also transformed those works in ways that brought them closer to the lived experience of Renaissance men, largely stripping off the “otherness” of the classical world, at once familiarizing and dehistoricizing the experience of the past. This phenomenon has been widely discussed in studies of vernacular translation of the fourteenth century, so I will not dwell upon it here.²⁶ It is, however, worth noting that, in the case of Acciaiuoli’s version of the *Florentine Histories*, the process is not so much one of familiarization as of re-familiarization. Bruni’s Latin had transformed and elevated the grubby particularity of Florentine wars and civil unrest, as described by Villani and others, into a classical never-never land of liberty, republican virtue and imperial glory. Acciaiuoli’s translation, though hardly returning to the racy idiom and gossipy style of Villani, still does much to refamiliarize

self. BNCF MS Magl. XXIII.153, folios unnumbered (= *Repertorium*, no. 799) says the text was “tratto di greco in latino da messer Lionardo d’Arezo e uolgareizzato da’llui ouero da un suo discipolo.” Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS Parm. 312, fol. 2r (= *Repertorium*, no. 2078), says the translation is “per uno suo caro amico.” Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional, MS Iluminados 41, fol. 72r (= *Repertorium*, no. 1184) says the text was translated “per un suo amicho e discipolo”. Since this is the earliest and most magnificently decorated copy of the translation, it is possible that its scribe, the son of Bruni’s close friend Nicola di Vieri de’Medici, or Nicola di Vieri de’Medici himself, was the author of the translation; the colophon reads: “Scritto per me Charlo di Nicchola di messer Veri de Medici nellanno MCCCCXXXIII”. According to Biondo Flavio’s *Italia Illustrata*, Nicola di Vieri de’Medici was a student of Bruni; see *Biondo Flavio: Italy Illustrated*, ed. and tr. Jeffrey A. White (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 305 (6.28).

²⁵ Acciaiuoli’s preface is in Florentine edition (Jacobus Rubeus) of 1476, which was reprinted in facsimile under the title *Storie fiorentine—Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini*, presentazione di Eugenio Garin (Arezzo, 1984).

²⁶ See the literature cited by Witt, *Footsteps*, 180–210.



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the text for Florentine audiences. Battles are fought by *condottieri* and managed by Florentine *commissari*, not by *praefecti*; Guelfs and Ghibelline parties contend for preeminence, not “the patriotic party” and “the opposing party;” the unspecified “war machines” of the Latin original are translated so as to suggest contemporary military techniques; public offices, taxes and procedures in Florence are given their real names rather than Bruni’s made-up classicizing equivalents. In this respect, too, Acciaiuoli makes the lessons of Latin humanism more comprehensible and more relevant to the ordinary experience of middle-class Florentines.

Whatever the compromises *volgarizzatori* may have made in presenting Latin humanism to a vernacular-reading audience, it is clear that in Florence and elsewhere in Italy the major themes of Bruni’s civic humanism were available to, and even popular among, readers of the Tuscan and other vernaculars.²⁷ Those themes were transmitted both by Bruni’s own vernacular writings and by vernacular translations of his Latin works. In view of this evidence we need to revisit the assumption often made in the modern secondary literature that humanism was always an affair of elites. Even if its patronage and leadership comes from a small group of wealthy, powerful and well-educated men, it clearly had ambitions to spread its cultural values further down the social pyramid into the middle classes, and across gender lines to women. That those ambitions were not vain is shown by the numerous copyists and printers who spent time and resources making Bruni’s work available in the vernacular. Bruni, of course, is only one author, even if an extremely popular one. I suspect a full account of vernacular humanism in the Quattrocento would disclose a far more popular movement than we have hitherto imagined.

²⁷ Among the Italian translations of the *De bello punico* is one in Milanese, another in Neapolitan dialect. The treatise *De origine Mantuae* was translated into a northern Italian dialect.



APPENDIX A LEONARDO BRUNI IN THE VERNACULAR

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1. Works originally written in the vernacular

| | MSS. | EDNS. |
|--|------|-------|
| <i>Canzone a laude di Venere, secondo l'opinione di Platone</i> (1424?) | 23 | |
| <i>Canzone morale, De felicitate</i> (ca. 1424?) | 44 | |
| <i>Difesa del popolo di Firenze nella impresa di Lucca</i> (1431) | 64 | |
| <i>Epistola mandata a Papa Eugenio IV</i> (1435) | 2 | |
| <i>Lettera al popolo di Volterra</i> (1431) | 23 | |
| <i>Lettera allo illustrissimo conte Francesco Sforza</i> (1439) | 13 | |
| <i>Novella di Antioco, re di Siria</i> (1437) | 62 | 2 |
| <i>Oratione detta a Nicolo da Tolentino</i> (1433) | 101 | |
| <i>Oratione fatta pe' chapitani della Parte Guelfa visitando i</i> <i>Signori</i> | 8 | |
| <i>Oratione fatta pe' chapitani della Parte Guelfa visitando il</i> <i>papa</i> | 9 | |
| <i>Risposta agli ambasciatori del re di Raona</i> (1443) | 47 | |
| <i>Sonetto "Spento veggio merze sopra la terra"</i> | 22 | |
| <i>Vite di Dante e del Petrarca</i> (1436) | 156 | 6 |

The list excludes public correspondence written by Bruni or under his authority as chancellor; diplomatic reports; and other public documents of Bruni's chancellorship.

The existence of at least five *dicerie* and several Italian poems are attested, but these works are now lost. There is also a large number of *dubia* and *spuria*, including a volgare translation of Cicero's *Pro Marcello*, now attributed to an *anonimo quattrocentesco*. The statistics on editions cover only editions printed before 1600.

2. Latin works translated into vernacular languages

Original works by Bruni are listed first, followed by his Latin translations from the Greek. The translations are all fifteenth-century unless otherwise noted.



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| INTO ITALIAN | MSS. | EDNS. |
|--|------|-------|
| <i>Cicero Novus</i> | 6 | |
| <i>Commentaria rerum graecarum</i> (2 versions) | 2 | |
| <i>De primo bello punico</i> (5 versions) | 120 | 12 |
| <i>De bello gothico</i> (2 versions) | 30 | 5 |
| <i>De temporibus suis</i> (2 versions) | 8 | 2 |
| <i>De origine Mantuae</i> | 43 | |
| <i>Historiarum Florentini populi libri XII</i> | 19 | 4 |
| <i>Laudatio Florentinae urbis</i> | 1 | |
| <i>Oratio coram Alphonso Aragonum rege</i> | 13 | |
| Six letters | 11 | |
| Aeschines, <i>Epistola ad Athenienses</i> | 1 | |
| Aristotle, <i>Ethica Nicomachea</i> (2 versions) | 10 | |
| St. Basil, <i>Ad Adolescentes</i> (2 versions) | 1 | |
| Plato, <i>Epistulae</i> (partial version) | 1 | |
| Plutarch, various lives | 4 | 2 |
| Xenophon, <i>Tyrannus</i> (attested but lost) | — | |

There also survive *volgarizzamenti* of two public letters for Florence (18 MSS) and a papal bull (3 MSS), all originally composed by Bruni in Latin

| INTO SPANISH | | |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Novella di Antioco</i> | 1 | |
| Five letters | 2 | |
| <i>De bello gothico</i> | 6 | |
| <i>De primo bello punico</i> (2 versions) | 3 | |
| <i>De militia</i> (2 versions) | | |
| <i>Isagogicon moralis disciplinae</i> | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Oratio in hypocritas</i> | | 1 |
| <i>Vita Aristotelis</i> | | 1 |
| <i>Vite di Dante e del Petrarca</i> | 1 | |
| Aristotle, <i>Economica</i> (2 versions) | 4 | |
| Aristotle, <i>Ethics</i> | 5 | 1 |
| St. Basil, <i>Epistola ad adolescentes</i> | 1 | |
| Homer, <i>Orationes ex Iliade</i> | 2 | |
| Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> | 4 | |
| Xenophon, <i>Tyrannus</i> (based on the lost Italian version) | 1 | |



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| INTO FRENCH | MSS. | EDNS. |
|---|------|-------|
| <i>Cicero Novus</i> | 2 | 1 |
| Speeches from the <i>Historiae Florentini populi</i> (s. XVI) | | |
| <i>De bello gothico</i> | 4 | |
| <i>De primo bello punico</i> | 27 | 4 |
| Aristotle, <i>Economica</i> | | 1 |
| Boccaccio, <i>Fabula Tancredi</i> | | 3 |
| Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> | | 1 |
| Plutarch, <i>Vita Demosthenis</i> | 1 | |
| Xenophon, <i>Tyrannus</i> | 1 | |

| INTO GERMAN | | |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Cicero Novus</i> (s. XVI) | | 3 |
| <i>De bello gothico</i> (s. XVI) | | 1 |
| <i>De primo bello punico</i> (s. XVI) | | 1 |
| <i>Isagogicon moralis disciplinae</i> | 1 | |
| Aristotle, <i>Economica</i> | 1 | |
| <i>Fabula Tancredi ex Bocatio</i> (tr. from Bruni's Latin version) | | 3 |
| Xenophon, <i>Tyrannus</i> | 1 | |

| INTO ENGLISH | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>De bello gothico</i> (s. XVI) | 1 | 1 |

SOURCE: James Hankins, *Repertorium Brunianum: A Critical Guide to the Writings of Leonardo Bruni* (1 vol. to date; Rome, 1997–), I: *Handlist of Manuscripts*. [Two more volumes are in preparation; vol. 3 contains the catalogue of vernacular translations.]



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APPENDIX B

An anonymous reader's note (s. XV) on Bruni's *Novella di Antioco*, entitled *Conclusione sopra la potenza delle donne*.

SOURCE: Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS Ricc. 2254, fol. 136r-v.

Mirabil cosa me senpre paruto, et esser parrebbe credo a'cciaschuno che coll'animo riposato raguardaxe, quanto e quale sia la potentia che le onestixime donne ànno negli huomini. Considerando che t[r]anta uirtu e scientia, quanta fu in Aristotile, Virgilio o Dante et altri assai elegantissimi e superlativi filosafi e poeti auexe amplissimo luogo questo atto d'amore femminile, et non solamente nei giouani anni ma ne maturi o ue[s]tusti. Il quale atto d'amore, benche naturale, comune e quasi necexario sia, niente di meno non che comendare, ma schusar non si puo degnamente. Ma chi sara intra noi mortali giusto giudice a'cchondannare o chorreggiere chi in parte da'ccio fusse compreso? Veramente non sia ego – o poca fermeza, o bestiale appetito et desiderio degli huomini! Che cosa non possono in noi le donne se elle uogliono, che eziandio non uogliendo e non isforzando si poxono assai e gran cose, come tutto giornno per esperie<n>tia si uede, et massimamente se ànno dote da natura di bellezza, vageza e altre cose assai continuamente per loro ne chuori degli huomini prochuranti.

Et che questo sia uero, lasciamo stare quello che Giove per Europe o Erchule per Iole o Paris per Elena facessino, percioche cose poetiche sono. Molti di poco sennele ex timore bbon fauole. Ma mostrisi per le cose conueneuoli ad alchuno dinegate. Era ancor nel mondo piu che una femina quando il nostro primo padre, lasciato il comandamento statogli fatto dalla propria bocca di Dio, s'acchosto alle propie persuasioni de lei? Certo no. E Dauit, non obstante che molte n'auesse, solamente ueduta Bersabe, per llei dimentico Iddio, il suo regnio che si decreder che gli auese fatto se ella alchuna cosa auesse adomandato. Et Salamone al-chui senno niuno aggiunse mai dal figliuolo di Dio in fuori non abbandono colui che sauio la uera fatto et per piacere a una femina inginocchio e adoro Balaim. Che diro degli egregii e famosi e eruditissimi dottori che di tanti e si excellentissimi filosafi, che degli admirabili et infiniti oratori huomin quasi diuini, si di filicita d'ingiegnio et excellentia di dotrina, si della elegantia e facundia, si di grauissime sententie abbondantiximi, che questo incredibile uigore d'amore abbi auto i'llor' forza?



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Che fe' crede che molti altri dani una altra cosa tirati che dall'amore et piacer loro faccendo adunque conclusione, perche piu in dir discendermi non poxo che piu carte ordite* non ci sono, credo certissimamente per tua discretione et humanita diletteissimo bono t'achosterai meco et insieme diremo era tanti et tali sublimissimi filosafi excellentissimi poeti et acutissim<i> dottori prenominati non achusato ma schusato anplissimamente puo passare. Il nome del giovinetto Antioco, essendo come si uede tenere e giouinetto, stato crudelmente percoxe dalle aureate et acutissime di Chupido sagitte. Il quale non solamente contra i benigni e gentilissimi spiriti come fu quello d'Antioco a potentia e valore, ma etiandio contra i marmorei obstinati et lapidei. *Et sic est finis.*

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* This is the last page of the MS.

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